

Message Text

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45

ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-02 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-15 SAJ-01

EUR-12 ACDA-10 OMB-01 IO-13 /103 W

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R 050620Z AUG 76V

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8690

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

UNCLAS CANBERRA 5675

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: NA

TAGS: AS, US, PT, ID, IN

SUBJ: AUGUST 5'MELBOURNE AGE' EDITORIAL ON U.S. AND AUSTRALIAN
ATTITUDES TOWARDS EAST TIMOR.

REF: CANBERRA 5673

1. FOLLOWING IS FULL TEXT OF AUGUST 'MELBOURNE AGE' EDIT-
ORIAL REFERRED TO IN REFTEL:

QTE. REPORTS THAT THE UNITED STATES IS PREVAILING UPON
AUSTRALIA TO BE NICE TO THE INDONESIANS ARE, AS CAN BE EX-
PECTED IN ANY DELICATE DIPLOMATIC EXERCISE, MORE THAN A
LITTLE CLOUDED. PRIVATELY, US OFFICIALS IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA HAVE
STATED, AND REAFFIRMED, THAT WASHINGTON DOES NOT WANT
CANBERRA TO ALLOW ANY FURTHER DETERIORATION IN RELATIONS WITH
JAKARTA OVER ITS ANNEXATION OF EAST TIMOR AS THIS IN TURN
COULD JEOPARDIZE AMERICAN ACTIVITY IN THE AREA. THE PREMISE
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IS SIMPLE: A FRIENDLY AND CO-OPERATIVE INDONESIA IS ESSENTIAL

TO US GLOBAL STRATEGY. IN PARTICULAR, INDONESIAN COMPLIANCE IS NECESSARY IF US NUCLEAR-ARMED SUBMARINES ARE TO USE THE STRAITS OF OMBAI-WETAR, NORTH OF TIMOR, WHICH MARK THE FAST-EST AND SAFEST UNDERWATER PASSAGE BETWEEN THE PACIFIC AND INDIAN OCEANS. ACCORDING TO THE OFFICIALS, THE US CONCERN WAS RELAYED TO AUSTRALIA TWICE: ONCE THROUGH DIPLOMATIC CHANNELS IN CANBERRA AND LATER IN WASHINGTON DURING THE VISIT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. FRASER. IN CANBERRA, THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT SAID MR. FRASER HAD NOT RECEIVED ANY CAUTION CONCERNING INDONESIA AND TIMOR WHILE IN WASHINGTON - A NICELY WORDED DENIAL AS FAR AS IT WENT.

2. QTE. WHAT PERHAPS IS MORE IMPORTANT IS THIS:

1. THE PROPOSITION UNDERLYING THE US VIEWPOINT AS EXPRESSED TO OUR SOUTH-EAST ASIA CORRESPONDENT, MICHAEL RICHARDSON, CARRIES A WEIGHT OF LOGIC WITHIN THE CONCEPT OF BIG-POWER STRATEGY, NOTABLY IN THE GLOBAL MANOEUVRING BETWEEN THE US AND RUSSIA. IT IS EASILY CREDIBLE.

2. ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, THE MESSAGE HAS BEEN FIRMLY PLANTED ON CANBERRA'S DOORSTEP. THE METHOD OF DELIVERY IS NOT THE CARDINAL FACTOR.

3. MR. FRASER, THROUGH HIS PECULIAR BRAND OF FOREIGN POLICY, HAS MADE IT ESPECIALLY EASY FOR WASHINGTON TO ISSUE SUCH A STRICTURE TO AUSTRALIA, IRRESPECTIVE OF WHETHER THE LABEL IS "REQUEST" OR "WARNING". THE PRIME MINISTER HAS NOT ONLY WORKED HARD AT RESTORING THE CLOSEST POSSIBLE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CANBERRA AND WASHINGTON (WE CERTAINLY IMPUTE NO CAUSE FOR BLAME HERE) BUT ALSO HAS PUBLICLY PROCLAIMED WHAT AMERICA SHOULD OR SHOULD NOT BE DOING IN SUCH NEIGHBORING REGIONS AS THE INDIAN OCEAN. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, WASHINGTON MAY WELL FEEL THAT ATTEMPTING TO INFLUENCE AUSTRALIA'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS A NEIGHBOURING POWER IS NOT SO MUCH INTERFERENCE IN OUR PRIVATE AFFAIRS AS A THOROUGHLY JUSTIFIED INVOCATION OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S INNER QTE SPECIAL MATESHIP. END INNER QTE.

4. QTE. PROBABLY, MR. FRASER NEEDS NO URGING ON THE ISSUE,
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ANYWAY. HIS PREOCCUPATION WITH WHAT HE, AND MANY RESPONSIBLE PEOPLE, PERCEIVE AS A SOVIET GLOBAL THREAT IS WELL KNOWN. WHAT THE SITUATION DOES POINT UP ONCE AGAIN, HOWEVER, IS THE TRAGIC DISPOSABILITY OF TINY NATIONS AND MINORITY GROUPS IN A WORLD OF SUPERPOWER INTERESTS. IT ALSO REMINDS US, ONCE AGAIN, OF THE MORAL DILEMMA POSED TO AUSTRALIA TIME AND AGAIN OVER THE TIMOR ISSUE. WHAT HS HAPPENED, IN EFFECT, IS THAT WE HAVE BEEN ASKED TO STOP REBUKING INDONESIA FOR ITS

BRUTAL TAKEOVER OF PORTUGUESE EAST TIMOR IN DEFERENCE TO WIDER INTERESTS INVOLVING WHAT MIGHT BE CLAIMED TO BE THE STRENGTHENING OF OUR OWN STRATEGIC SAFETY. IN VIEW OF JAKARTA'S FAIT ACCOMPLI, THIS MAY NOT APPEAR DIFFICULT. BUT IT MAKES A SAD POSTSCRIPT TO A MOST UNHAPPY STORY.

5. QTE. ARE THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF 600,000 EAST TIMORESE (OR WHAT IS LEFT OF THEM) LESS OR MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE PURSUIT BY OUR MOST POWERFUL ALLY OF SOVIET CONTAINMENT? IT MIGHT - JUST POSSIBLY - BE EASIER TO ANSWER SUCH A QUESTION HAD AUSTRALIA BEEN MORALLY RESOLUTE OVER EAST TIMOR FROM THE START. BUT IT WAS NOT. MR. WHITLAM, WHILE DEFENDING THE RIGHT OF SELF-DETERMINATION, CONCEDED TO JAKARTA EARLY IN THE PIECE THAT THE TERRITORY WAS TOO SMALL TO BECOME INDEPENDENT AND ECONOMICALLY VIABLE. IT CAN BE ARGUED THAT FROM AN INHERITED POSITION OF IMPOTENCE MR. FRASER AND HIS FOREIGN MINISTER, MR. PEACOCK, LATER TRIED TO SALVAGE SOMETHING FROM THE SITUATION. BUT TUT-TUTTING IS A FRAGILE WEAPON IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, AS THE UNITED NATIONS DISCOVERED LONG AGO. NOW, HOWEVER, AUSTRALIA FINDS ITSELF IN A POSITION WHERE EVEN OFFICIAL TUT-TUTTING IS DEEMED INEXPEDIENT. TO THE STRICTLY PRAGMATIC, THIS MAY BE PUT DOWN AS ONE OF THE GRIM REALITIES OF A MESSY WORLD IN WHICH MOST NATIONS SOONER OR LATER BECOME COMPROMISED BY BIG-POWER STRATEGIES. HOWEVER, THIS IS NOT AN ARGUMENT WE WOULD WELCOME PUTTING TO THE EAST TIMORESE. TO THEM, FATE HAS BEEN NOTHING SHORT OF GROTESQUE. PERHAPS, THEN, AFTER ALL, IT IS MORE FITTING TO MOURN IN SILENCE. END QTE.
HARGROVE

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